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ABSTRACT

Major efforts have been made in the United States during the last 15 years to develop high quality programs for the teaching of African languages. These efforts are encountering increasing difficulties which are largely a function of a variety of special problems affecting the teaching of African languages. All of these problems contribute to another, the problem of the high cost of teaching African languages. In an attempt to give some idea of the scope of language teaching efforts in the United States and the cost of African language instruction, information has been gathered from eight African language and area centers. The data indicate that 28 languages were actually offered at these centers in 1976-1977 and 37 other languages could have been offered in case of demand. Data on costs and enrollments indicate that the cost of teaching African languages was $269 per credit hour as compared to $60 for Romance languages. Federal grants for these programs represent only a small proportion of the cost of these programs. A breakdown is given for costs of salaries and fringe benefits, laboratories and materials, institutional support, enrollments and credit hours, cost per enrollment, and cost per credit hour. (Author/AMH)

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THE COST OF TEACHING AFRICAN LANGUAGES:

MAJOR PROBLEMS AND THEIR NATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

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1. The Effort to Develop African Language Teaching

Major efforts have been made in the United States during the last 15 years to develop high quality programs for the teaching of African languages. In spite of impressive accomplishments, these efforts are encountering increasing difficulties which are largely a function of a variety of special problems which affect the teaching of African languages. Among them are the facts that:

--More than 1,000 distinct languages are spoken in Africa; only four of these (Arabic, Fula, Hausa and Swahili) serve as regional languages spoken by large numbers of people in several countries; most African countries have several major languages; many are spoken by millions of people;

--While English, French, Portuguese or Spanish are useful in much of Africa, there remains a vital need for language competencies in many African languages for effective business, diplomatic and scholarly activity in Africa;

--Instructional material for most African languages is very limited; in most cases it has been necessary to prepare basic texts and other teaching materials; major progress has been made in this, but much work remains to be done;

--There is a need to teach large numbers of languages if even a small part of the African continent is to be covered; many of the individual language courses will necessarily be small enrollment courses;

2. The Problem of Cost

All of these special problems contribute to another: the problem of the high cost of teaching African languages. As American universities increasingly find themselves in financial difficulties they are under pressure to eliminate high cost programs. The language programs have been defended from such pressures by noting the clear national need to teach these languages so that a variety of important interactions can be carried on in African countries. But it is very hard to convince the legislator from Black Earth, Wisconsin or Thermal, California that state taxpayers (or university trustees) should pay the

major share of the cost for teaching African languages.

As this pressure increases, so does the pressure on University funding, to the point that we are now in danger of starting on a downward spiral that will take years to repair. For once universities begin to cut down on language instruction, they inevitably cut into the training of African specialists in politics, history, business, geography, agriculture and other areas. When this happens, universities often eliminate their African area programs (as has happened to at least one American university this year).

Without substantial help, we may find that what is now but a handful of programs with broad African specialization will be even fewer in the next two or three years.

3. Study of the Cost of Teaching African Languages

In an attempt to give some idea of the scope of language teaching efforts in the United States and the cost of African language instruction, we have gathered information from the eight African language and area Centers which currently receive support under the NDEA Title VI Language and Area Studies Centers Program administered by the Office of Education. These Centers are at the following universities:

University of Florida	Northwestern University
University of Indiana	UCLA
University of Illinois	Stanford University
Michigan State University	University of Wisconsin-Madison

4. The Scope of Language Teaching

Our data indicate that an impressive number of languages are being taught at the African Studies Centers. Table I shows enrollments at eight of the Centers during the 1976-77 year.

TABLE I

Enrollments in African Languages at Eight African Studies Centers:

Afrikaans	4	Kikuyu	12
Akan/Twi	34	Krio	4
Amharic	26	Kru	3
Arabic	201	Lingala	3
Bambara	33	Mende	24
Bemba	2	Pidgin	1
Chichewa-Chi Nyanja	6	Setswana	12
Efik	6	Shona	2
Ewe	2	Sotho	14
Fula	1	Swahili	362
Ga	1	Temne	4
Hausa	83	Wolof	45
Igbo	2	Xhosa	1
Jaba	3	Yoruba	97

In addition to these twenty-eight languages which were actually offered at eight of the Centers most of the Centers have the capacity to teach a number of other languages, depending on demand. Additional capabilities during the 1976-77 year are shown in Table II. It should be noted as well that a number of other American universities, not possessing African Studies Centers funded under Title VI, also offer African languages courses.

TABLE II

Other African Languages That Could Have Been Offered in Case of Demand

1976-77

Acholi	Ibibio	Ngizim
Bade	Ijo	Shona
Baule	Kamba	Somali
Berber (Tamazight and Tamacheq)	Ki-Rwanda	Soninke
	Kombe	Sukuma
Chi-Mwi: ni	Kpelle	Susu
Dyula	Lango	Swazi
Dzamba	Luganda	Teso
Edo	Luhya	Tigre
Etsako	Luo	Tigrinya
Galigna/Oromigna	Makonde	Vai-kono
Ge'ez	Mauritanian Creole	Zulu
Gisiga	Ndebele	

5. Costs of Language Teaching Related to Enrollments

Universities find that the most useful way to measure and compare costs of teaching programs is to relate factors of cost to student enrollments, using credit hours awarded to students as the basic unit of comparison. Table III summarizes the data on costs and enrollments at the eight African Studies Centers, and indicates that the cost of teaching African Languages was $269 per credit hour.

TABLE III

Data on Costs Related to Enrollments

at Eight Universities (1976-77 academic year)

I. Costs	
1. Salaries and fringe benefits	
a. Faculty	$ 659,263
b. Teaching assistants	79,920
c. Language informants	42,247
2. Laboratories and materials	
a. Language laboratories	62,943
b. Materials	16,362
3. Institutional support (52% of wages and salaries, excluding fringe benefits)*	325,075
4. Total costs, one year	$1,185,810
II. Enrollments	
1. Total enrollments, one year	1,066
2. Total credit hours, one year	4,407
III. Costs Related to Enrollments	
1. Cost per enrollment	$1,112
2. Cost per credit hour	$269

*See paragraph below.

Notes on the costs and enrollments data are as follows:

Faculty salaries. These figures include only the portion of salaries of faculty members attributable to African language teaching.

Teaching assistants. These figures include only teaching assistant salaries for services in African language courses.

Language informants. Most of the Centers make use of language informants in teaching. Most often these informants are African students resident on the campuses concerned who are first-language speakers of the language concerned.

Laboratories and materials. Our data almost certainly understate this cost, primarily because universities do not directly apportion such costs to the departments who use the facilities. A detailed study

of these costs at the University of Wisconsin-Madison showed that the annual cost (excluding capital) of language laboratory facilities used by the department of African Languages and Literature approximated $15,000. Estimates received from the other universities averaged only $7,992 for lab facilities. We think that the University of Wisconsin figure probably gives a considerably more accurate picture of the cost of language lab facilities.

Institutional support. The universities provide a wide variety of support factors, including secretarial and administrative salaries, janitorial and other up-keep services, telephone, mail and copying facilities, and heat and electricity. None of these supporting costs are included in category 1 or 2 of Table III. To deal with this element of cost we have averaged federally negotiated research "overheads" reported to us by Center Directors. The resulting figure--52%--is applied to salaries only, excluding fringe benefits. As an estimate of institutional support, it is certainly a conservative measure.

6. African Language Teaching Costs Compared to European Languages

To provide perspective on the costs of African languages we prepared comparative data on the cost per credit hour of teaching romance languages (the most commonly taught foreign languages in American universities). The comparison (based on an average of per-credit-hour costs of teaching romance languages at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Michigan State University) is as follows:

Cost per credit hour, African languages:	Cost per credit hour, Romance languages:
$269	$60

This indicates that it is nearly four and one-half times as expensive to teach the African languages than it is to teach the romance languages.

7. The Factor of Large and Small Classes

As noted earlier, a principal reason why African language teaching programs are high-cost programs is that enrollments in individual African language courses tend to be small. We classified enrollments in language courses at the eight centers according to whether they were "large" classes (six or more students) or "small" classes (five or fewer students). Results are shown in Table IV.

TABLE IV

African Language Credit Hours at Eight Centers
Large and Small Classes

Number of "large" class credit hours	2,803
Number of "small" class credit hours	1,354
TOTAL CREDIT HOURS	4,157
Proportion of total credit hours made up by "small" classes	33%

It should be noted that the definition of "large" classes (six students) is a very modest one. Many of the "small" classes in fact consist of one or two students, usually preparing for specific research, business or government projects. Finally, it should be noted that the factor of cost represented by small classes would be much greater if it were not for the fact that many members of the language facilities teach these small classes in addition to their normal loads.

8. Federal Support for Teaching African Languages

Principally through the National Defense Education Act Title VI Program the federal government has made an important contribution to the development of African Studies in general and the teaching of African languages in particular. The federal contribution, however, represents only a small proportion of the cost of these programs. Grants to each African Studies Center have, in recent years, been approximately $100,000. Costs of the African Studies Programs range up to ten times this amount. Almost all of that larger portion comes from university funds--in most cases, ultimately from state tax revenues, student fees, and gifts. The NDEA Title VI program has been one of the federal government's most successful programs in higher education. Federal dollars are now matched at a ratio of almost 10 to 1 with 11% of the funding coming from federal sources.

The ratio of financial support for these programs of national significance is improving from the federal standpoint, as Title VI funding has remained almost static, whereas costs of the programs have risen at the rate of inflation. But it seems clear that a point has now been reached where a further diminution of the federal support factor will become counter-productive as universities feel obliged to reevaluate their own commitment to African languages teaching as they are forced to cut back on high cost programs regardless of national need.

This would be particularly unfortunate at a time when United States interests in Africa--both political and commercial--are growing rapidly. We feel that there is an urgent need for renewed commitment on the part of the federal government to support African Languages and Area Studies Programs if the existing language training resources are to be maintained at least at their present level.

9. Conclusions

In less than two decades, the United States has made enormous progress in developing centers of expertise about Africa which are among the best in the world. These centers are of increasing national significance as a wide variety of American relations with the African countries become increasingly important to the United States.

African language programs are also the crucial foundation on which scholarship about Africa in other disciplines is based. The university centers have dealt vigorously and effectively with the two most basic challenges of African language teaching: the fact that a large number of languages must be made available, and the fact that teaching materials and languages skills are in short supply.

What has been accomplished has been at considerable sacrifice to the institutions that have chosen to contribute in the African field. During a period of financial stringency, African language teaching programs become vulnerable to reevaluations of priorities. University officials and state legislators are quick to perceive that they are being asked to carry a burden which should be regarded as substantially a national one. In relation to individual university budgets, the burden is a heavy one. In the larger national context, it is a light one indeed in relation to its benefits and its significance for America's economic and political future.

The accomplishments of the past can and should be preserved and built upon. But if that is to be done, the problems of cost must be given fair recognition, and the steady trend toward diminished outside support (for language instruction, student fellowships, language materials, and faculty research) must be reversed.